

First Encounter

A/N: This is the second installment of the Snowy Encounters series, which began with the short story Snowflakes and Memories. Please read that first before starting this. However, this story will run for several chapters.

Pristine silver and white ice crystals hung all over the trees and off the roof of the small cottage situated on the edge of the Yorkshire moor, which Severus had decided to rent this year, having gotten fed up with all the crazed hustle and bustle of London at Christmastime. This cottage represented peace and quiet where he could brew his potions undisturbed by requests from nosy neighbors and allow his son the freedom to run around in fresh air and go skating on the pond or build a snow wizard on the front lawn. Harry had turned seven this year and seemed full of restless energy, which sometimes drove Severus crazy, for his house on Spinner's End was not made to accommodate a rambunctious boy stampeding through it. But this remote cottage seemed to satisfy Harry's craving to run about like a wild thing.

The Potions Master peered out the window, snow had drifted up and around the cottage like a cocoon, surrounding the stone walls in a blanket of purest white, and in the field beyond, his son was making snow animals. Severus squinted, for he could no longer see the blue and red outline of Harry's jacket against the gray sky and the small wood on the edge of the property.

Alarmed, he went to the back door and opened it, ignoring the sudden gust of freezing wind, and called, "Harry? Harry, where are you?"

There was no answer, and Harry was nowhere to be seen. "Harry!" He bellowed again, just as a wind sprite flittered by. The sprites were the unseen guardians of innocent children, and they had clustered about his son ever since that long ago night the boy had appeared on his porch, in fulfillment of a promise made to Lily long ago. He continued to call for his son, panic infusing his normally calm and controlled demeanor.

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Tingling snowflakes drifted inside of the collar of Harry's coat, making him shiver, but he didn't dare to move. He was standing about five feet from a great silver wolf, just within the line of trees bordering the backyard of the rented cottage. The seven-year-old had never seen a real live wolf before, only ones in pictures. But pictures had never looked the way this magnificent animal did, all sinewy strength and size, with his beautiful coat sparkling with snow crystals, gazing at Harry with an odd sort of wistfulness from his brilliant golden eyes.

Harry stared and stared, unable to look away, mesmerized by the legend come to life before his eyes.

Wolves were supposed to be scary, evil monsters who ate little children, according to all the tales, but this wolf was not scary at all. Harry knew he ought to be afraid, but he wasn't. All he felt was a kind of awe. The wolf stood still as a statue before him, so close Harry could almost reach out a red mittened hand and stroke the thick pelt. The slight frosty wind kicked up spurts of snow and ruffled the wolf's thick coat, but the animal remained calmly looking at Harry, panting slightly.

Harry didn't move, hardly dared to breathe. He did not want to break the enchantment of this wonderful encounter, nor the way the big animal looked into his eyes. Like he knows me. The little wizard thought, even though that was ridiculous. Harry had never seen a wolf in his life, living as he did in London with his father.

He could feel the wolf's breath tickling his cheek, which made the frozen sensation in his limbs a bit easier to bear. So beautiful! I wish I could touch him. Just a little. But he didn't want to frighten the wolf away and so he remained very still, like his dad had told him to do if a strange dog came up to him.

He had no idea how long he had been standing there, at the forest's edge, though a part of him noted that his feet and hands were getting icy, even through his thick mittens and sheepskin lined boots. All he cared about was meeting the wolf, who with his silvery coat reminded him of a prince in a fable. A prince of the wildwood, Harry thought

dreamily, for he was the sort of child who had flights of fancy easily, and had been able to see the wind sprites at an early age.

“Harry! Harry, where are you! Harry James Snape!”

Harry jumped like a startled deer at the sound of his father’s voice. He had never heard that note in his father’s normally soft tone, raw and . . .frightened . . .if that were possible, for Severus had never been frightened of anything, that Harry knew, at least.

The magic moment was shattered and the wolf shook his head , scattering snow off of his coat and onto Harry’s cheek.

Harry turned to go, whispering , “I gotta go. But maybe I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Then he ran back through the woods towards the twinkling lights and warmth of the cottage, and his father, standing on the porch, with his arms crossed.

The wolf remained where he was for a scant moment, then whirled on silent paws and vanished into the trees, leaving no sign of his passing save for a single silver guard hair.

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“Where on earth were you, Harry?” Severus demanded, his heart thumping in relief as his son came running up to him from the snowy verge. “I called and called, why didn’t you answer?”

“Uh . . .I was playing,” Harry offered, shivering violently.

“Get inside, you’ll catch your death of frostbite,” Severus urged, putting a hand on the small of his son’s back to hurry him along.

He helped his son remove his snowy garments, drying them with a quick warming spell and hanging them upon a hook beside the door next to his own black great coat. “Off with your boots, son,” he ordered briskly, and Harry sat down and pulled his wet boots off, setting them beside the door to dry.

The house was wonderfully warm and toasty after the chill of the winter day, and Harry sighed gratefully.

“Let me see your hands,” Severus ordered, giving the boy a hand up from the floor.

Harry obediently held out his hands for Severus to inspect. They were slightly tinged with red, but the elder wizard saw no signs of frostbite.

“I’m fine, Dad. Just a little cold.”

“Another few minutes and you could’ve been a frozen statue,” Severus sighed. “Where were you? How many times do I have to tell you, stay in sight of the house? It’s too easy to get lost out here, Harry.”

“I could see the house, Dad. I was just . . .umm . . .by the trees a ways.” Harry hedged, knowing he’d be in trouble if Severus knew he’d been in the woods.

“Next time, you come immediately when I call you, young man. Understood? Or else you won’t be allowed outside without me.” Severus scolded.

“Okay, sir. Sorry.” Harry apologized. He peered up at his father from his fringe of dark hair.

Severus harrumphed, wanting to maintain his stern façade, but his relief at finding his son safe and unharmed made his anger flicker and die. “Come, let’s have tea and hot cocoa, and then we can finish the Christmas decorations.”

“Okay, Dad!” Harry said, and smiled at his father, happy the man wasn’t angry with him anymore.

Over dinner that night, which was a simple meal of chicken soup with dumplings and ham sandwiches, Harry asked, “Dad, are there wolves in these woods?”

“Wolves?” Severus set down his spoon and cocked his head at his son. “Harry, wolves have been extinct over here since the Middle Ages. They were hunted down by people hundreds of years ago. There are no more wolves in Great Britain, Harry.”

“Not even one?”

Severus shook his head.

Harry bit his lip, uncertain whether to tell his father about what he had encountered that afternoon. He had never kept secrets from Severus before, mostly because he’d never had anything he couldn’t share with his father. But something urged him to keep silent for now, and so he asked, “Why were they all killed, Dad? Did the Muggles do it?”

“Mostly, yes, but we wizards were just as guilty. It was a shameful thing, but people were afraid of them, and sometimes, what people fear, they hurt and kill,” Severus said heavily. “They thought wolves were evil, like in the tales, that they ate little children and attacked people for no reason, and were monsters.”

“Like the werewolves, Dad? And in the stories like Little Red Riding Hood & Peter and the Wolf?”

Harry knew Muggle as well as wizard stories, since Severus thought it prudent to tutor the child, who was born of both a wizard and a Muggleborn witch, in both cultures, even as he himself had been.

“Yes, son. Like that. And so people hunted and killed wolves whenever they found them, until they were gone. We wizards were as guilty as the rest of those noble lords and such, for we used wolfskins in our shapechange potions and charms, or claws and teeth for a Draft of Courage. And we told ourselves it didn’t matter, for what was one less wolf in the world?”

“But that was wrong,” Harry objected. “Wolves aren’t all bad or wicked. “

“Right. A wolf is an animal, they can be dangerous, but like most wild things, they would run away before they would harm a person.” Severus agreed. “You have nothing to fear from wolves, Harry.”

“I know,” his son answered, smiling at the memory of the great silver wolf, and wondering if he would see it again tomorrow. “Are there any stories about good wolves, Dad?”

Severus thought for a moment. “Yes. A few. One of them is a wizard tale—A Wolf in Winter. I can read it to you tonight before bed.”

Harry smiled, he loved new stories, and one good thing about having magic was that whenever you went somewhere, you could take along the whole library. Like his son, Severus loved to read, and the library from Spinner’s End had been shrunk and transported here in the Potion Master’s pocket.

“Sounds cool, Dad. Now can I put the star on the tree top?”

“Of course. After you wash your face, you’ve got cocoa all over it,” Severus said, hiding a smile at his son’s mustache.

Harry went over to the sink to scrub his face, then they walked into the small living area where a live evergreen stood in the corner next to the fireplace.

Harry picked up the twinkling Lumos-enchanted star and Severus levitated him to the top of the tree to set it on the top, as he did every year.

“There! Now it looks like a Christmas tree!” Harry exclaimed, same as usual.

Then he went to get some ornaments from the wooden box to hang, but his mind was filled with the image of the silver wolf with a dusting of snow upon him, standing tall and proud in the trees, a knowing look in his deep amber eyes.

Next: Harry listens to Severus tell the tale of "A Wolf in Winter" and meets the mysterious wolf yet again!

Wolf Tale

"In a time long ago, there lived a Potions Master named Rue Ashkevron and his small son, Will, named for the Sweet William flower that grew about the dooryard of their little cottage in the woods. They lived there alone, for Rue's wife had passed the Veil long years before, and since then the Potions Master could not bear to be around people, so he retreated to the woods, where he brewed drafts to sell by owl post and raised his son alone. Now Will was a bright child, sometimes prone to mischief, but a good lad at heart, and he loved best of all to wander in the woods and gather special potion ingredients and talk with the wild things, for he had the gift of Animal Speech. . . ."

Harry listened, rapt, as Severus began reading *A Wolf in Winter* from his big green leather-bound book *Scamander's Tales and Legends for Children*, a compilation of wizard stories focusing on fantastic animals and extinct creatures. He thought the Potions Master and his son reminded him a bit of him and his dad, for he too had no mother.

Severus continued reading, "One day, as he was picking some burdock to use for a salve, in the middle of a wintery day, Will encountered a great white wolf, the biggest wolf he had ever seen. At first he was frightened, but he greeted the wolf politely, as he had been taught, and the wolf was pleased with the boy's manners and told him he was known as Silverstrike, Prince of wolfkind. "I and mine have seen you and your sire often, roaming the wood, but as you harm none, and practice a goodly craft, we shall permit you to stay, here in Wolf Wood."

"Thank you, Your Grace," said Will, and he bowed to the wolf lord.

Silverstrike bowed back, then told him he might come to visit his pack tomorrow, in a meadow not far from the cottage.

Will said he would be happy to meet Silverstrike's family, and so a most unusual friendship was formed between the wolf and the wizard's son."

Severus read about how Will cured Silverstrike's young pup of a nasty plague of fleas and worms, giving the pup a healing potion from his father he had helped brew. Silverstrike told Will that he was the first human who had ever shown such kindness and that he was indebted to the boy. But Will said there were no debts between friends, yet Silverstrike held fast to his promise and did not forget.

"Does he save Will someday, Dad?" asked Harry eagerly, his eyes shining like precious emeralds in the light of the Lumos-spelled lamp next to his bed.

"If you'll let me finish the story, you'll find out." Severus said, tweaking his son's nose. He was lying half on his son's small bed, one long leg dangling off onto the rag rug in front of it, Harry tucked snugly under the moon and stars quilt in the crook of Severus's arm.

"And so Will grew up and became himself an accredited Potions Master, and he loved and respected all the creatures of the wood, but especially the wolves, and Silverstrike who was his best friend. Every year he would go to the den and see the new pups and play with the wolves, and dose them if they needed it. But Silverstrike never forgot his promise, and one day he had the chance to repay his debt.

"Young Will had gotten a reputation for being a brilliant if reclusive potion maker and word of his skill had spread far and wide, and certain colleagues of his had become jealous and wanted to ruin his reputation. So they spread rumors and lies about him being a werewolf and sent Werewolf Hunters to find him and kill him, for in those days it was a capital crime to be a werewolf." Severus's voice deepened here, and he looked at his son. "Perhaps I'd better finish this story another time, Harry. Or you might have nightmares."

"No! Oh please, Dad! I can't wait to see what happens! Please read more!" pleaded his son. "I'll never get to sleep unless I find out."

He fixed his father with his most potent green-eyed Lily-like gaze.

Severus looked away, then back and sighed. "Very well. But don't blame me if you get nightmares about Werewolf Hunters." He opened the book and resumed reading.

"And when the Werewolf Hunters came to Will's door on the night of the full moon, one cold winter's night, threatening murder, with spells of entrapment and swords and silver arrows, Will fled for his life into the forest. The Hunters came right behind, vowing to slay the werewolf, and chased poor Will until he nearly collapsed. But in his desperation, Will whistled, a special signal to summon aid from Silverstrike.

"The great white wolf heard and he came and brought the rest of his pack, some twenty strong gray wolves, with him, and they taught the would-be Hunters a grim lesson in harming a friend of the Wolf Wood. They bit and harried the Hunters all the way through the wood and almost to Hogwarts itself, howling and snarling, and the Hunters were so terrified that they vowed never to hunt wolves again, lest the vengeance of Silverstrike fall upon them."

"Yes!" cheered Harry, applauding.

"And thus the Prince of wolves kept his promise to the young Potions Master, and ever after the descendents of Will Ashkevron are remembered as wolf friends and allies. And legend says that if you see a large white wolf while wandering in the woods, remember to speak it fair, for you never know, it could be Silverstrike the wolf lord, who sometimes watches young wizards from afar, to see if one might become a friend like Will long and long ago, who judged a friend not on appearance, but on the heart within." Severus concluded the tale, then shut the book.

"If I ever met a wolf like Silverstrike, I would be his friend," Harry said earnestly, wondering if perhaps he had met the prince of Wolves that day.

"I don't doubt you would," the Potions Master agreed, ruffling his son's hair. "And there you have it, a tale of a good wolf. Now, I think it's time for a certain little boy to close his eyes and go to sleep."

"Aww, Dad! Do I have to?"

"It's late, son. And even if you're not tired, I am. You should be tired, you played all day outside." His father told him firmly. "Would you like me to rub your back?"

"Yes, please." Harry rolled over and Sev gently rubbed his back in small circles, much as he had done ever since Harry was a baby.

Harry found himself yawning and his eyes shutting in spite of himself. It was so warm and comfy and he loved the feel of Severus's hand on his back and the Potions Master began to hum softly and between one blink and the next, Harry drifted off.

In his dreams, he met with the great silver wolf again, and together they played and romped in the woods, and Harry rode upon his back and knew that so long as the silver wolf was there, no harm could come to him.

Severus left the little boy wrapped snugly in the eiderdown comforter, spelling the lamp to burn until daylight, for Harry hated the dark, and after giving the child one last caress on the head and a kiss on the forehead, departed for his own room right next door. Pleasant dreams, little one. He half shut the door, hoping that Harry would sleep without nightmares, he had forgotten there was a scary part to that tale, as it had been many years since he had read it.

But Harry slept peacefully and so did Severus, waking the next morning full of energy and eager to return to the wood's edge and see if the silver wolf was back, after he ate his bananas and oatmeal with brown sugar, that is.

"Harry, why are you rushing through breakfast like this?" asked Severus, raising an eyebrow at the way his son was shoveling oatmeal into his mouth. "The snow will still be there in fifteen minutes, it won't melt."

"I know, but . . . eating's not important like playing, Dad," Harry explained with typical seven-year-old logic. He gulped down the rest of his hot cocoa, nearly burning his tongue.

Then he ran over and started pulling on his boots, coat, mittens, scarf, and hat. He wished he were like the silver wolf, and just had a nice furry coat to keep him warm and didn't need to bother with all the nuisance of bundling up to stay warm. But he knew better than to go out without doing so, his father would never allow it. Harry had tried that once and Severus had made him stay inside for an entire afternoon and write I will put my winter coat, hat, and boots on before playing outside fifty times.

So he made sure he was all bundled up before dashing out the back door and scampering across the yard, with the snow sparkling in the morning sun like bits of spun sugar icing. As he ran, he recited mentally the rules Severus had drummed into his head-stay within sight of the house, don't go near the pond without Dad, come immediately when called, and no wandering in the woods. The rules beat out a tempo in his head, in time to his rapid footsteps, as he crunched across the hardened snow, following in his own footprints from yesterday.

When he reached the treeline, Harry halted, gave a guilty glanced over his shoulder, to see if his father was watching, then walked four feet into the trees and stood still, arms wrapped about himself, and waited.

He waited and waited for what seemed like years, there in the chill snowy woods for the silver wolf.

Please come. Please come. Please. I want to be your friend. He chanted over and over in his head, stamping his feet so he wouldn't get frozen.

The wind nipped at his cheeks, turning them a rosy red and he brought up a mitten to rub the snow crystals from his eyes. When he lowered his hand, the silver wolf was there.

Harry said nothing for a long moment, but he beamed from ear to ear. Then he said, very softly, "You came back! I'm glad you did. It's kinda boring being here with nobody to play with, 'cept Dad. Y'know?"

The wolf did not respond, except to flick an ear and shake his fur slightly.

Believing it safe to talk, since the wolf hadn't run away yet, Harry said, "I like it here and all, but . . .I'd like a friend even more. Like the wolf Silverstrike and Will in the story A Wolf in Winter? Ever hear of that one? No? Well, you look kinda like that Silverstrike wolf . . .you aren't, are you?"

Harry could have sworn the wolf's eyes now twinkled in amusement, but then he figured he must just be imagining things. "Guess not, I think he'd have died, since even magical wolves don't live for hundreds of years. But maybe you're one of his pups or something? Anyway, can I call you Silver?"

The wolf bobbed his head once, almost in agreement, and Harry grinned even more broadly.

"Okay, Silver it is!" He extended a hand to the big wolf, and Silver lowered his head and sniffed it.

"My name's Harry and I live just over there . . .well, it's a holiday house. Me and my dad, Severus , rented it for the break. He's a Potions Master, like Will and Will's Dad Rue in the story. Can I touch you, Silver? Just once?"

The wolf remained still and Harry hesitated. Maybe magical wolves like him didn't like being petted like someone's dog. But oh, how he longed to run his fingers through the deep silvery fur! He inched off his mitten and held out his hand, letting the big wolf make the first move.

Silver sniffed the air, then lowered his head and Harry felt the thick fur brush his fingers. It was soft like silk and yet the top coat had rougher hairs, and it was warm. Harry sighed in bliss and combed his whole hand through Silver's ruff, and very gently scratched the patient animal behind the ears.

"Your fur . . .it's so thick and so . . .soft underneath," the little boy murmured. "Like cotton, sort of." He continued to stroke the big wolf,

marveling that this must have been what it was like for Will in the story, except Harry couldn't talk to animals like the other boy could.

But mindful of the respect the tale preached, Harry drew back and pulled his mitten on. "Sorry. Didn't mean to keep petting you like you were a dog. I know you're something special. Like Silverstrike in the tale."

Once more, amber eyes met emerald and Harry had the strangest feeling that the wolf was trying to tell him something. He wished he had a special talent like Will and could understand animals. "It's too bad you can't talk, like in the stories. I don't have real good control over my magic yet, see? And, by the way, I'm a wizard, case you were wondering. But that's a secret, Dad says I can't tell anybody at school, since they think wizards and magic aren't real, just made up stories." He spent most of the year going to a Muggle primary school, and spent the nights and weekends with Severus at Hogwarts if he were teaching and the holidays and summers at their house at Spinner's End.

To his shock, the big silver wolf lowered his head and butted Harry playfully in the chest.

"Hey! What was that for?"

Silver got down on the ground on his front paws with his tail sticking up and gave a queer half-bark.

Harry was puzzled, till he remembered a neighbor's dog doing that once. "Oh! I see, you want to play, right?"

The wolf jumped up and nudged Harry again, then turned and ran a few steps and looked over his shoulder. The gesture, plain as day, told Harry he wanted the boy to chase him.

So Harry did, in and out of the trees and around the outskirts of the lawn, though the snow was too deep from him to run quickly, and most times the wolf ran circles around him and knocked him down.

But Harry didn't mind, not even when snow fell down his jacket inside his shirt. At last he had a friend to play in the snow with. He ran and jumped and even threw snow at the big animal, who would shake it off and pant in amusement, then bound through the drifts again and knock the boy sprawling.

Though the wolf never checked him hard, and always minded where he put his great paws, each of which were bigger than Harry's whole hand.

When Harry grew tired, he sat down and rested, and the wolf stood over him, watchful.

The little boy and the great wolf played all morning and part of the afternoon, Harry chattering to Silver nonstop as they did so, telling him all about the legend of Silverstrike and his life with Severus. The running kept Harry warm and he wasn't cold, but all too soon, he heard his father calling and regretfully turned to Silver and said, "That's Dad, must be supper or something. Bye, Silver. See you tomorrow! We'll be here for two weeks."

Then Harry rose from the ground, brushed himself off and went back towards the cottage, yelling, "Comin,' Dad!"

Next: Harry & the wolf grow closer and Severus does not suspect.

Harry's Secret Friend

Harry was so excited over his new friend that he quite forgot he should keep the wolf's presence a secret and blurted out to Severus while he was drying the silverware after dinner, "Hey, Dad, what if I told you I saw a wolf in the trees today?"

Severus was so startled by his son's matter-of-fact tone that he fumbled a platter and almost dropped it. "You saw what? A wolf? But Harry, I told you, wolves are extinct here. Unless they're in a zoo. Where did you see this animal, son? Perhaps it was a large dog that looked like wolf."

But Harry shook his head stubbornly. "No, Dad. He was a big silver wolf, like Silverstrike, and we played in the snow together."

"Like Silverstrike, hmm?" Severus said knowingly. Perhaps this was an imaginary friend, Harry had such a fantastic imagination, and Sev could recall having imaginary friends also, when he was growing up, before Lily came to live next door.

It was perfectly normal for a child Harry's age, especially since he had to be careful with the Muggles he befriended at school, and he spent much of his time after school with Severus at Hogwarts, instead of among children his own age, though over half of the Potion Master's students adored the boy and treated him like a cross between a younger brother and a lovable pest. Even so, perhaps the boy was lonely, and Severus wondered if he could arrange a time when Harry could associate with a wizard child his age, like the Zabinis, whose mother Angelina was also a Potions Mistress, and had a son Blaise who was a few months older than Harry. The Zabinis were purebloods, but not associated with Voldemort, like the Malfoys, and since Severus had retired from his spying duties last year, he refused to associate with such suspect people any longer, nor permit Harry to either.

But when can I find the time to have Harry play with Blaise? Next term will be very busy and I just don't know how I can arrange things. But that was a puzzle to figure out another time. Right then, Severis wished to relax a little and enjoy the holiday with his son. "Tomorrow,

perhaps, we can go skating on the pond, and build a snow fort. How about that?"

Harry considered. He really wanted to play with Silver again, but he also enjoyed spending time with his dad, because Severus was often busy or tired during the school year, and rarely had much time to play with him. Plus, he loved learning to ice skate. "Sure, Dad! That'll be great." He just hoped poor Silver wouldn't return and wait all day for him.

"After lunch, tomorrow, we'll go skating, Harry." Severus said, then he added sternly, just to be safe, "And if you happen to see any big dogs that look like wolves, you're to stay away from them, they could bite."

Harry twisted the dish towel in his hands and didn't reply. He didn't want to promise his dad something he wouldn't be able to keep.

"Harry? Am I understood?"

"Yes, Dad," the youngster murmured reluctantly, and felt instantly guilty for saying something he knew he didn't mean. He hated lying like this, Severus had taught him that a lie was a dreadful thing and one should never lie unless telling the truth was a matter of life and death. "A wizard's word is his bond, and you should always remember that, and speak the truth," he had told his son. In fact, the only time Harry could remember getting spanked ever had been when he was five and had played with Severus's wand and then lied and said he never touched it, despite the evidence to the contrary.

So the lie left a bitter taste on his tongue, and he hoped Severus never found out how he had disobeyed him. If only he could make his father understand that the wolf wasn't dangerous, that he wanted to be Harry's friend, and perhaps something more . . . Harry had gotten the feeling that the wolf was watching out for him, for when he'd slipped and fallen while playing, the wolf had trotted over to him and waited till he had climbed to his feet before continuing their romp. Clearly, this was no ordinary wolf. But he sensed that Severus didn't quite believe that the wolf was real, and Harry wasn't up to arguing with him right then.

So he simply drank his evening hot cocoa with marshmallows and ate some shortbread, Severus made wonderful shortbread stars, and let his father read to him from the big book of Christmas legends, which included a story about animals getting the ability to speak from Father Christmas on Christmas Eve and the enchantment lasted through Christmas Day. The Day of the Christmas Talk, it was called, and it gave Harry an idea. What if that legend were also true, and what if the wolf gained the ability to talk on Christmas Eve? Then Harry could introduce him to Severus and the wolf could convince his father that he was good and meant Harry no harm.

Harry mentally counted the remaining days till Christmas Eve. Five days. Five days of pretending to obey Severus's rule until then. Harry wished he could speed up time. Then again, he wanted to make the time he had with the great wolf last as long as he could. Just in case something went wrong and Severus forbid him to see the wolf again.

That night he prayed to St. Nicholas, who was also Father Christmas, to give his father the gift of understanding and to allow Harry to be friends with Silver. And when he looked out of his bedroom window before sliding beneath the covers, he saw a tiny blue-skinned wind sprite there. The little creature waved once before vanishing in a cloud of snowy sparkles, and Harry knew it would carry his message to the patron saint of children. He prayed it would be answered.

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The next day, Harry and Severus went ice skating on the big pond, which was actually a freshwater lake, and Harry learned how to balance by himself and to skate backwards a bit. At first he was very awkward, and fell on his bottom several times. But he didn't complain much, and got right up and tried again. Severus gave him points for persistence and made sure he wasn't too bruised. "Come on then, Harry, and try again," he encouraged the little boy. "You almost had it that time."

Harry dusted off the seat of his jeans and prepared to try again, rubbing his bottom and saying, "Dad, did you ever fall down when you first learned to skate?"

Severus bit his lip, then gave a short nod. "Can you keep a secret, Harry?"

"Yes."

Severus knelt down and put his hands on his son's shoulders. "When I was first learning how to skate, I fell down and took Lily, your mum, with me. We slid all the way across the ice and into a snowbank."

"A snowbank?" giggled Harry. "Truly?"

"On my honor. And . . .what was worse . . .we got stuck in it for a good twenty minutes, since our skates tangled in each other and we nearly froze . . ." Severus admitted ruefully. "I was so embarrassed, I figured Lily would never want to be my friend again . . .But she was a true friend, she forgave me my clumsiness and said it was her fault for telling me to spin around so much . . .and after that I practiced until I was able to outskate her and we laughed about that little incident years later."

"I wish I'd seen that," his little imp laughed. "It would have been so funny!"

Severus pretended to glower at him, but Harry knew it meant nothing and all he did was laugh.

"Making fun of your father, eh? I think you need to be taught a lesson in manners, Mr. Snape," he mock-growled.

Harry smirked at him insolently, and Severus promptly picked up the little boy, tucked him under an arm, and skated over to a large pile of snow and tossed him headlong into it. "There! That ought to cool off your impudent attitude!"

Harry sputtered, emerging from the snowy cocoon, still wearing a mischievous grin. "No fair, Dad!"

"Oh, quit whining," chuckled his father, and with a wave of his wand, he cleaned up his son, and took his hand and drew him back out onto

the ice. "Now then, watch me. Left foot forward, right foot following. Well done."

Harry imitated him, and Severus held to his son's hand, until he was sure the boy could skate on his own.

Harry wobbled a little, but managed to skate a short distance by himself. "Look! I'm doing it!" Then he lost his balance and sat down. "Oww!"

Sev helped him up. "You'll master it eventually. You just have to keep trying, son. Practice makes perfect."

"Uh huh. But I'm tired, Dad. And my bum hurts."

Severus picked him up. "Guess that means we ought to head back home. We'll practice some more tomorrow, all right? I'll draw you a hot bath and that should help that sore behind, along with some bruise balm."

Harry nodded, and lay his head down on Sev's shoulder. "Someday, I'm gonna be as good a skater as you."

"With practice, you certainly will," Severus said, then cautioned, "However, you are never to go on the pond unless I'm with you, Harry. Sometimes the ice grows thin in places and you could fall through it, if you don't know what to look for."

Harry murmured an assent, yawning. All he wanted right then was a bath and bed after, for once even his indefatigable energy had been exhausted.

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The next morning, they returned to the pond, and Harry's skating was much improved. And so it went for the next day, and the next, though the rest of the afternoon Harry spent playing alone in the yard, or so Severus assumed. Actually, Harry spent that portion of the day romping through the snowy woods with Silver, who once again waited patiently at the wood's edge for his newfound friend.

Harry chased the silver wolf through the snow, throwing snowballs at him, though few of them ever hit him. But the game was fun anyhow, as Silver spun and leaped like a young pup, running circles around the little wizard, playfully tussling in the snow, his great jaws closing in mock snaps on the air, or once or twice, Harry's cap. And the merry sound of a child's laughter echoed through the winter air, and it was the sweetest music to the silver wolf's ears ever heard in the forest.

Silver, dignified as he was, nevertheless abandoned all dignity when he played with Harry, allowing the child to scratch his belly, or half climb up on his back and ride him across the far portion of the yard, permitting him liberties he normally never would have allowed anyone.

He even allowed the child to hug him about the neck, burying his face in the thick silver ruff, smothering his instinctive need to draw away from human contact. For Harry he would fight even his survival instincts, for the child gave him something no one ever had- acceptance and unconditional love. And that was priceless. Like Silverstrike and Will before them, the two forged a bond of friendship that transcended the ordinary, though all too soon it would be tested, in an unexpected way.

Thanks for all the lovely reviews, they really motivate me to keep writing this.

Here's a slice of apple pie with ice cream and some coffee.

Next: Harry disobeys Severus and something terrible happens as a result

Through the Ice

A day before Christmas Eve, Harry laced up his skates and ventured out upon the pond without Severus. The little boy knew quite well he should not be there without his father, but he wished to practice making figure eights in private, without being observed, for a time. So he woke up early, slipping out of the house while Severus was still asleep, an hour before he usually rose. The sun was shining brightly, as it had been for the past two days, and though it was cold, the weather had shifted, so the wind that blew through the bare trees surrounding the pond was not the icy Northern gale, but a gentler one from the South. All of these conditions combined to make the top of the ice very slick and wet and in some places, thin it out.

But you could not tell that simply by looking at the ice covered pond. To Harry's unaided eye, the pond appeared the same as always, and he gave it a few token taps with a stick and found it solid before venturing out onto it. His frequent practices over the last four days had made him able to skate alone without holding onto the older wizard's hands for the most part, and he began circling, the blades of his skates kicking up an odd sort of watery spray, since there was a film of water over the top of the ice.

Harry, busy concentrating on his maneuvers, barely noticed the difference, except when his skate slipped on a particularly slick patch of wet ice and he skidded, sideways on his bottom, across the pond.

Now, that had happened before, for despite his improvement, the little boy was not an expert and still fell quite often. Doing figure eights is hard, he thought, brushing at the wet spots on his knees and starting to stand up, the way he had done countless times before. Merlin, but now my bum aches and feels wet, ugh! He reached back to feel his rear end, swiping at it hastily, when he heard a strange crackling sound.

Huh? What is that?

He peered down and saw, to his horror, that the ice beneath him was cracking and breaking.

He panicked utterly, and tried to dig in his skates and get off the thin ice, but that proved to be a terrible mistake. The blade of his skate broke through the ice and what had been a tiny crack widened and the ice split apart under Harry's weight, plunging the hapless boy into the icy depths of the pond.

Now the pond was not deep, only about nine feet or so, but to a terrified child, it may as well have been the depths of the ocean. Harry could swim, but the shock of submersion in the arctic water took his breath away, robbing him of the ability to breathe, to think, to move. All he could feel was shards of ice, stabbing and burning, all throughout his body, a cold so intense it burned.

He opened his mouth to howl, but the deadly chill had stolen away his voice, and all that emerged was a thin wail, too faint to be heard by anyone inside the cottage. He splashed and struggled, widening the hole of ice, but the cold was like a stone fist, squeezing him about the chest. He gasped, coughed, and tried once more to summon his voice, but he was mute.

Dad! Help me! Help! I'm so cold!

He scrabbled for purchase on the jagged hole, but the ice was still too thin to bear his weight and it kept breaking off. His legs were growing heavy, too heavy to move, and a strange sort of sleepy lassitude was creeping through him. So tired . . . need to rest . . .

Above, the wind sprites fluttered and cried out in horror, for they could tell the child was dying, and were unable to do much save fly back to the window of the cottage and tap hard upon the glass, trying to awaken the sleeping Potion Master. Awaken, Severus Snape! Thy child is in grave peril!

Inside, the Potions Master stirred, wondering what annoying creature was tapping on his window pane at six in the morning.

* * * * *

Others flew down to hover in front of Harry, entreating him to stay awake and not give in to the water's icy embrace.

But Harry was exhausted, his strength all but gone, and he began to slip beneath the black water.

In another minute all would have been lost.

Until a pair of sharp teeth closed over the back of Harry's ice-rimed jacket.

The silver wolf dug his paws into the ice, which cracked alarmingly, but he never released his hold. He pulled with all of the strength in his mighty frame, muscles rippling as he sought to reclaim the boy from the cold depths of the pond. Harry was dead weight, unresponsive, his skin as blue as that of the hovering wind sprites, making Silver's task that much harder.

Twice, the wolf's feet broke through the ice, but he never loosened his grip on the child.

Inch by agonizing inch, shifting his grip slightly to grasp Harry's shoulder for better purchase, Silver pulled the child out of the frigid deadly water. He dragged the boy across the ice, never slackening his hold, though every muscle in his shoulders and back felt as though it were on fire, torn and throbbing from the effort. That did not matter. All that mattered was the boy.

Silver managed to pull Harry through the snow a ways before the rest of his strength gave out and he crumpled to the ground, curling instinctively about the shivering frozen child. Though the thick fur warmed Harry as did the wolf's own body heat, Silver sensed it was not enough. The flicker of life within the boy was slowly dying.

Amber eyes peered worriedly down at the motionless form, and suddenly something else awoke in the big animal's brain, a consciousness that had lain dormant for many long months. The child needs help, far more than I can give him, or else he will die. I must save him! Nothing else matters, only that he must not die.

Silver tilted his head back and howled.

The full-throated deep summoning howl of an alpha wolf calling for help.

It rang through the still dawn like the clarion call of a trumpet.

Such a sound had not been heard in over three centuries upon the Yorkshire heath.

ARR-OOOW! ARR-OOOW!

Again and again the howl rang out, urgent and desperate, and unable to be mistaken for anything but the mournful cry of a wolf.

Then the silver wolf bent his great head and licked the child's face, attempting to warm the waxen blue-tinged cheeks with his tongue.

Harry's eyelids fluttered, and he opened them a slit, wincing at the pain the light brought, yet able to see a familiar pair of eyes framed by silver fur. He opened his mouth to speak the big wolf's name, but his voice would not work.

That was the sight that greeted a frantic Severus as he Apparated down to the pond, following the spine-tingling howl of the hunting wolf.

A shaggy beast sat half-atop his son, licking him, and looking as though it were going to take a bite out of his child. A wolf-here? Impossible! Yet he could not doubt the evidence of his own eyes. Nor what its intentions were towards his defenseless child.

Fury shot through him, and he pulled his wand and yelled, "Get away from my son, you bastard!"

Fiery missiles shot from the Potion Master's wand, peppering the wolf with stinging hot pellets. The wolf yelped and backed away, reluctant to leave the boy, showing his teeth in disapproval.

"Go on, get, you miserable vicious brute! How dare you try and eat my son?" Severus screamed, sending another volley off.

Silver crouched, snarling, but some of the fire pellets struck him on the nose, and that was too much. He whirled and fled, desperate to escape the hail of fiery projectiles. vanishing into the snowy woods like a ghost.

The Potions Master did not bother pursuing, his only concern now was his injured child. Severus flung himself down beside his son, chanting a warming charm, and as the heat returned to Harry's frozen frame, the child shivered violently, and managed to say, "Dad . . .where's Silver . . .?"

"Hush. You're going to be all right. I'm here, you're safe." Severus worked frantically, heating the air up about him so high the snow melted while slowly infusing his son's limbs with warmth. "Harry . . .Merlin help me . . .you're near frozen to death . . ."

Harry groaned, for the warmth that had felt so good was now starting to hurt. A lot.

He began to cry, begging his father to make it stop.

"Shhh . . .I know, child . . ." He gently lifted his son and holding him close, Apparated back to the cottage, where he had plenty of potions to ease the pain of returning circulation, warm clothes and blankets, and spells to restore limbs affected by hypothermia and frostbite.

An unpleasant twenty-five minutes followed, as Severus dosed a groggy whimpering Harry with a Pain Reliever plus an Anti-Frostbite Draft as well as a Decongestion Draft, since Harry had swallowed some of the icy water as he thrashed about. Harry writhed and sobbed, for the returning circulation to his limbs was very painful, though Severus did his best to ease them by massaging his son's feet and hands, arms, and calves, rubbing in a gentle brisk motion.

"Oww . . .Dad . . .it hurts . . .owww!"

His arms and legs prickled and burned like fire and he couldn't help crying, even though he knew he should be brave and quit bawling like a little baby.

"Easy, son. Relax, you'll feel better soon. You almost froze to death . . .but you're going to be all right." Severus murmured, still massaging, relieved that the color was starting to return to the pallid limbs. The potion worked quickly, one reason why poor Harry was in so much pain. "If the wind sprites hadn't come tapping at the window . . ." he trailed off, shuddering with the awful thought of finding his only son dead from a skating accident.

"Silver . . .saved me . . ."

"What? What did you say?" Severus asked, now taking a warmed towel and swaddling his son in it, he had removed all of Harry's soaking wet frozen clothes before beginning the treatment.

"The wolf . . .did you see? . . .he saved me . . .from the lake . . ."

Harry repeated, tears still trickling from his cheeks, though the terrible prickling burning was almost gone. Now he felt comfortably warm and sleepy.

"You're delirious. The wolf bit you, Harry. He would have killed you if I hadn't driven him off with a Meteor Swarm."

Silver? But he would never hurt me . . . That must be wrong . . ."No . . .Dad . . .Silver . . .saved me . . ."

Severus just shook his head. The poor boy was rambling, half out of his wits from his near brush with death. "Hush . . .Go to sleep, Harry." He chanted a quick charm to dry Harry's hair, then lifted his son off the couch and carried him into his room, where he quickly put Harry into warm flannel pajamas and tucked him into bed.

Then he simply sat there, transfiguring a sock into a wooden chair and just looking at his son, whom he had come so close to losing on this sunny morning to winter's cold embrace. He silently thanked the wind sprites and then he clasped his hands in his lap and watched his son sleep, tears blurring his eyes. Merlin's grace, Harry, but I nearly lost you. Had I been a minute later . . .you might have been joining your mother beyond the Veil in heaven. Of course, you shouldn't have been on the ice in the first place, but I'll deal with that bit of disobedience later. Right now, I just need to calm down and to thank

God for allowing me to save my son, both from the lake and from the jaws of that wolf or whatever it was.

A part of him did wonder how Harry had gotten from the lake to the shore, then assumed that the wolf had gotten his son out, though not to save him as Harry assumed, but to kill him, for Severus had seen the animal nibbling at his son, like a person nibbling on a piece of chocolate before consuming it. It was enough to make him believe in all the gory tales of wolves murdering babies in the cradle and he shivered involuntarily, wondering if it could have been a werewolf and not an ordinary one. Werewolves were known for their love of human flesh. And Severus's one secret fear was of being bitten by a werewolf, harking back to a nasty prank played on him as an adolescent, when Remus Lupin had nearly bitten him as he entered the Shrieking Shack on a dare made by Sirius Black and James Potter. A foolish malicious prank that could have ended in tragedy, both for Severus and for Remus, since a werewolf who bit a human must be killed under Ministry law, and Remus could have killed Severus in the throes of the curse.

Severus had never forgotten or forgiven Potter and Black for that.

And yet, gazing down at the son of his school rival, he felt none of that animosity towards Harry. True, Harry was James's child, but Severus had raised him from a toddler, watched him say his first word, nursed him through his first illness, potty training and tantrums, had scolded, punished, and hugged him, and now he could not imagine his life without Harry in it. A Potter by blood, but a Snape by choice. You may have his face, but you have my heart, and always shall. And I will do whatever I have to do to ensure your safety, you reckless wizardling, up to and including locking you in your room till you're thirty.

He tugged a lock of his silky black hair free from its queue and examined it for any strands of gray. Miraculously, there were none. Yet. But by the time he was thirty, Severus predicted he'd be white as an old man, the way things were going. Ah, the joys of raising an impulsive headstrong child! He wished someone had warned him.

Well, what did you think of Silver? And of Severus's reaction to him?

Next: Harry's stubborn refusal to give up Silver's friendship sparks a dreadful quarrel.

Misunderstandings

Harry awoke shivering and too warm, which was a nice change from the way he'd felt before-frozen to the bone. His throat was dry but at least the horrible stinging and tingling in his fingers and toes was gone. He wriggled them experimentally, yes, they felt perfectly okay now, thank Merlin! He rubbed his eyes and sat up, only then recalling his glasses had fallen off in the water, and all he could see was a big blur. Until his little hand groped on the nightstand automatically and found . . .his glasses!

Huh? How did . . . ? Dad must've fetched them from the lake, I guess. He stuck them on his face and the room came into focus.

The first thing he saw was his father, sitting half curled in a chair beside his bed, his head resting on his chest, sleeping.

Harry eyed him thoughtfully. Wonder if I could sneak past him now? He looks awfully tired, and I really need to go. That used to be a game he played with Severus when he was very little, trying to sneak out of bed and creep down the hallway without getting caught. Only Sev always knew when he was out of bed and would order him back to sleep as soon as he set a toe out of the bedroom door. He wriggled back the covers and slid out of bed, careful to put both feet down on the carpet before standing up.

His father never stirred. So far, so good.

Harry tiptoed past the chair, across the room, and had just put a foot outside the door when a familiar voice demanded, "And just where do you think you're going, young man?"

"Rats! Uh . . .hi, Dad. I'm going to the bathroom, that's all." Harry answered, then scurried from the room, wondering how it was that even asleep, Severus knew what he was doing? Maybe it was true, and parents really did have eyes in the back of their heads and ears like bats. Will I get like that too when I'm grown, or does it just happen when you have kids? The seven-year-old mused as he entered the bathroom. Yet another question he needed to write down in his Question Book for Sev to answer when he was older, along with why

you should never tuck a wand inside your waistband, how did you French kiss a girl, and when you were too old to be grounded for life.

When he emerged from the bathroom, he found Severus standing in the hallway. "How do you feel, Harry?"

"Umm . . .a little achy and I'm hot and my throat is dry," Harry answered, all in one breath.

Severus immediately put a hand on his forehead. "You've got a fever and probably a touch of a chill as well, considering you nearly drowned. Back in bed for you, son."

"Can I have some juice?"

"Yes, and another potion as well."

Harry groaned, knowing it was probably going to taste yucky, as usual when he took medicine. "Merlin, Dad!"

"Never mind, mister. You don't want to be sick for Christmas, do you?"

Harry shook his head, and found himself lifted into Severus's arms before he could protest being carried like a baby, and in two strides he was in his room and tucked back into bed. His dad could move quicker than lightning when he wanted.

Then his dad summoned a Fever Reducer and made Harry drink it down, gave him some juice, and read to him until he fell asleep again. But he tossed and turned and dreamed that someone was chasing him and Silver was drowning in the lake and Harry couldn't get him out . . .

When he woke again, he felt much better, and Severus was absent from the room. But before Harry could move, the Potions Master returned, and felt his forehead again. "No fever. How are you?"

"I feel okay now. Can I get up?"

"You may. After we have a talk about your disobedience, Mr. Snape."

Harry gulped. He knew he was in big trouble when his dad started calling him Mr. Snape, like he did his students at school. He dropped his eyes to the comforter, knowing he deserved to be scolded into next week for going out on the lake by himself. "I'm sorry," he muttered in a very soft very guilty little voice.

Severus felt his instinctive need to comfort warring with his need to dole out consequences for his son's deliberate misbehavior. He firmly squelched the comforting part for now and slipped the stern You've-Been-Naughty-and-Ought-to-Be-Spanked glare into place, before saying in a tone that was soft yet dripping with disapproval, "Look at me, Harry James Snape." He waited until the boy's gaze slid slowly from the coverlet up to his obsidian eyes before he rapped out, "What are you sorry for?"

"For . . .for going skating on the lake after you told me not to, sir."

"And why did I tell you not to?"

"B'cause . . .I could fall in or . . .or get hurt."

"Then you knew what you were doing was wrong, correct?"

"Yes, sir."

"But you went ahead and deliberately disobeyed me. Why?"

Harry felt his eyes mist. But he wasn't going to cry. "Don't know."

"You don't know? You just went skating for the hell of it?" Severus leaned forward, gripping the arms of the chair.

"N-no. I wanted . . .to practice by myself . . .so I could show you a new move." Harry stuttered. He felt the awful weight of guilt lodge somewhere in his middle. "I . . .I didn't mean to fall through the ice, Dad!" To his utter embarrassment, he started to cry, just like a whiny baby.

Severus had to fight to keep that mask on, he always hated it when Harry cried, it made him feel like a troll. "I know you didn't, Harry, but that was precisely the reason I ordered you to stay away from there, so that wouldn't happen. When we first came here, I went over the rules with you and you promised to obey them. And now you've broken that promise."

Harry cried harder, for he knew that breaking a promise was one of the worst things he could do, by Severus's lights. "I'm sorry! I'll never do it again."

"By breaking that promise, you almost died, child! You nearly froze to death a stone's throw away from the house, and I would have awakened to find a dead little boy or never found you at all if the current had dragged you under. " Severus said, his voice rising despite his best efforts to keep calm. "If I had lost you . . .I cannot even begin to explain how terrible I would feel . . .Merlin save me, boy, but you are my life, do you not see that?" Then he was reaching out and pulling the child into his arms, hugging him so hard he gasped for breath. "Never ever do that again!"

Harry was sobbing and babbling apologies, then he lifted his face from Severus's shoulder and asked, in a miserable, tiny voice, "Are you . . .gonna spank me?"

"I should." Severus answered, and gave him a single smack on the bottom. Harry yelped. It stung quite a lot. "I ought to give you the worst wallop of your life, but . . .I think almost freezing to death is sufficient to ensure you never do anything like this again. And you're grounded for a week also. You foolish reckless child! Between the lake and that bloody wolf trying to kill you . . .!" he found himself alternately hugging and shaking his son.

"Dad, Silver would never hurt me!" Harry cried, when he could talk again, once Severus had stopped shaking him. "He saved me, he . . .pulled me out of the water." His recollection of events while he was in the lake was fuzzy, but that much he did know.

"He pulled you out all right . . .and was about to bite you from what I saw."

"No! He's a good wolf, Dad! He's my friend!"

"Your friend?" Severus repeated, incredulous. "That was a wild beast intent upon killing a helpless child. I know what I saw."

Harry jerked away from him suddenly, scrambling back onto the bed. "No! Dad, you don't understand! Silver is good, he's like the wolf in A Wolf in Winter! He was helping me! I've been playing with him and he would never bite me."

"You've been playing with that . . .that animal all along? After I told you to stay away from it?"

"He's a good wolf. He's like my best friend. He saved my life. You gotta believe me!"

"Harry, whatever you may think, I know what I saw. That wolf nibbling at you, howling in joy. Ready to rip out your throat! "

Harry shook his head stubbornly. "You saw wrong, Dad. Silver is my friend."

"I forbid you to be friends with that beast, Mr. Snape!" Severus snapped. "If I ever see it around here again, I'll hex it to the moon!"

Suddenly it was too much. Nearly drowning and freezing and then his father thinking Silver was a menace who had tried to kill him, and then saying he would hurt the great wolf, caused Harry's temper to snap. "NO! You can't do that! I . . .won't let you! You're a stupid idiot, Silver saved me when you couldn't and . . .and . . .you're mean and nasty and I . . .I HATE you!"

Then he jumped off the bed and ran out of the room, sobbing, leaving a stunned Severus standing in the middle of the room.

A second later, a door slammed, bringing the Potions Master out of his shock, and he spun on his heel and followed, "Harry! Come back here, this instant!"

He strode over to the only other room Harry could have gone into and turned the doorknob. Then he swore furiously. I don't believe this! That little brat's locked me out of my own bedroom!

Okay, now what do you think is going to happen?

Remorse and Revelations

Harry was so upset that he didn't even realize what he had done or where he had run to after he had raced out of his bedroom. He was just looking for a place to hide. He couldn't believe how his father had . . . ignored him when he said Silver was not dangerous, that he was a friend who had saved his life. Couldn't Severus see that Silver was just like the wolf prince Silverstrike? Why was he being so unfair to the big wolf and to Harry, who loved him?

The little boy sniffled, wiping away tears, but more just kept coming, and then he felt his nose start to run too. He had been feeling better, but now he felt ruddy awful again, though it had nothing to do with his near death on the lake and everything to do with Severus's refusal to accept Harry's wolf friend. He had even threatened to hex the poor animal, and to forbid Harry to see him as well . . . How could you, Dad? How could you?

He threw himself on the four poster bed covered in soft velvet blue hangings and a matching comforter and cried heartbrokenly, pounding the pillows, indulging in a temper tantrum worthy of the ones he'd thrown when he was two. It's no fair! How come I always have to do what you say and listen to you when you never listen to me? Silver's my friend, I love him, you mean old warlock! I have to see him again.

He felt as if his heart were being torn from him, for until today he had never spoken so to his father, whom he adored and respected. He had always thought Severus fair, even when he punished him for something. So it was a great shock to discover that his father was not perfect, did not always treat others how he would like to be treated, and didn't seem interested in hearing Harry's side of things when it came to Silver.

He heard his father banging on the door and ordering him to open it, but for the first time in a long time, he ignored Severus and just lay on the bed, weeping into the pillow. He knew his father was very angry, knew that he was now in possibly the worst trouble he'd ever been in, but right then he could have cared less.

He waited for the door to unlock, for his dad to come storming into the room, but the door remained shut and Severus did not enter, much to Harry's relief. He cried himself out after about ten minutes, and only then did he realize that he was in his dad's bedroom. Oh, Merlin! I've really done it now, I locked my dad out of his own room. He's gonna skin me for that.

Sitting up, he wiped a hand over his eyes and then he recalled the other awful thing he'd said to his father, besides calling him mean and nasty. I . . . said I hated him. I don't . . . not really . . . I was mad . . . but, oh I am so dead. He's gonna spank the daylights outta me for real and I'm not gonna get any presents from Father Christmas neither 'cause I was really bad, saying that about him , and disobeying him an' all. . .

The little boy started to cry again, guilt now gnawing in his chest. This was going to be the worst Christmas ever, he just knew it. And the worst part was, he was to blame for most of it. He recalled a Muggle song he had heard playing on someone's radio at school-I'm Getting Nuttin' for Christmas. The lyrics danced in his head especially the line-I'm getting nuttin' for Christmas, 'cause I ain't been nuttin' but bad. That was probably true, after the way he had talked back to his dad. Father Christmas was probably crossing his name off the "Nice" list and putting it on the "Naughty" one right this minute, and the only thing he could expect from his father was a sound spanking. Severus hadn't punished him like that in a long time, but if there was one thing Severus didn't tolerate, it was disrespect.

Miserable, Harry considered running away, but the mere thought of going out in the icy winter night scared him silly. Besides, it was dark outside, and he hated the dark. He wondered where Severus was, and why he had not come to unlock the door and punish him. He brought his knees up to his chest and put his head on them, the picture of miserable abject remorse, his hair flopping limply over his forehead and into his eyes.

* * * * *

Severus drew his wand, preparing to open the bedroom door with a charm, his temper bubbling like an overactive volcano. The sheer

nerve of the impudent little wretch! Calling me stupid and mean and nasty and saying he hated me for trying to protect him from a vicious predator that was going to kill him! How dare he, the ungrateful brat? After all I've ever done for him . . .he says he hates me? I love him more than myself and he prefers a . . .a mangy animal over me! He pointed his wand at the locked door, the syllables of an Unlocking charm on the tip of his tongue, hurt and anger intermingling in a volatile combination within him.

But his years as a spy stood him in good stead then, cautioning him on confronting the child when his temper was so out of control. He knew the first rule of confrontation was to be in control of yourself at all times, and he was very close to losing it. Stop and think, Snape. You can't go in there like this, you'll do more harm than good. Count to ten, Severus. And remember you're an adult, and show some self-discipline, for Merlin's sake! He berated himself. You don't want your son to hate you even more by punishing him too harshly, now do you?

Severus drew in a deep breath. Let it out slowly. Then he did it again and yet again. He had learned the price of self-control over emotions very early as a child, after his father had thrown him down a flight of stairs over a spilled glass of milk when he was four. Severus had broken an arm as a result, but he had also learned to fear his unpredictable father, and vowed to never be like him. Unfortunately, he had inherited his father's temper, and it had always been the bane of his existence. That was one reason why he had chosen to study Potions as his mastery, because you had to be utterly focused and controlled in order to brew correctly, and learning the necessary self-discipline had enabled him to also control his temper. That legendary control had been tested in his duties as a spy, quite severely, but he discovered that Harry could drive him over the edge even quicker than a whole cabal of Death Eaters.

He lowered his head, concentrating on breathing, and putting the anger back into a box in his head. Abruptly, he spun away from the door and walked away. He needed distance, time to let his temper cool, and to consider a logical course of punishment beyond throttling the disrespectful boy or walloping the daylights out of him. If there had been one thing he had learned over the course of his childhood,

dealing with the volatile Tobias Snape, it was that force only bred resentment and fear, not respect. Or rather, that respect born of fear does not last, and as soon as he was grown, Severus had left home and never looked back, repudiating his father utterly.

Severus walked out onto the back porch, reasoning that the chill winter evening might serve to cool his temper even further. What hurt and irritated him the most was not his son's defiance, for he expected that in a child, he had been a teacher too long not to know the stages children went through, but Harry's declaration that he hated his father. Spoken in a fit of childish anger, nevertheless that single word had the power to wound worse than a thousand daggers. Severus had spoken those words to his own father just once, on the eve he departed Spinner's End for good, they had been the last words his father had ever heard from him, and Severus had infused into them a lifetime of bitterness and hurt. And they had struck home, he had noted grimly as he Apparated away to his small rented room in Diagon Alley, where stayed while studying for his Potions Mastery. He still recalled the faint look of surprise and pain in his father's eyes and he had been glad that for once he had hurt Tobias the way the man had hurt him.

But now he wondered what he had done wrong to make his son say those words to him. Was he such a terrible parent? He had never mistreated Harry that he could recall, he had tried very hard to be fair when issuing rules and punishments, and he had thought he had done a pretty good job up until now. He blames me for not rescuing him from the lake, but how was I to know he would pull such a dumb stunt, and go skating alone? Maybe I should have . . .he is James's blood, and God knows Potter never had the sense of a pixie when it came to self-preservation. He was always rushing headlong into danger at school, like a blithering idiot. The Potions Master thought witheringly, pacing the length of the porch and back. All brawn and no brains-a typical Gryffindor. Did Harry inherit that trait from him, Merlin help me? Even so . . .he regards that wolf as a hero and me as . . .as . . .a mean nasty bugger.

And that hurt more than he could admit.

Severus harbored a deep mistrust of wolves, due to the incident in the Shrieking Shack some twelve years before, when he had almost been killed by the werewolf Remus. Ever since, he could not look at an ordinary wolf the same way again, and once he had been fascinated with the big canines. He had indulged Harry with his reading of *A Wolf in Winter*, believing the little boy would grow out of his fascination with them someday, and he had been perfectly willing to accept an imaginary wolf friend as well, but a real one . . .that was too much.

Especially when the damn wolf seemed to be replacing himself in Harry's affections.

Feeling himself growing agitated again, Severus stepped off the porch, intending to walk a bit around the yard, and while he was doing so, come up with a suitable punishment for his wayward son. On Christmas Eve, of all nights. He hated the position he now found himself in, that of a bloody despot, and he knew that whatever punishment he came up with, he would end up being the tyrant . . .again. Why me? Does this sort of thing happen to other parents, or am I the lucky recipient of such phenomenal occurrences? How am I to deal with this without coming off as being the worst father in the world? I HAVE to punish him, I cannot allow him to talk back to me with such disrespect, but whoever heard of punishing a child on Christmas, by Merlin's starry robe? Even my own father, bloody bounder that he was, never beat me on Christmas. The day after, maybe . . .but Christmas was sacred.

He sighed and continued to wear a path through the snow. Students sometimes shouted that they hated him at school, after he had given them a failing grade on a test or a detention, but he had always shrugged them off, for his reputation as a strict taskmaster served him well when he taught potions, since it was a very dangerous subject and he needed to maintain iron discipline in order to avoid fatal mishaps in the classroom. That was one time he didn't mind being an ogre, because it saved lives. But it was an entirely different matter when the child shouting "I hate you" was your own son.

As the Potions Master continued to ponder and pace, back and forth, hands clasped behind his back, his long hooded cloak billowing out

behind him like a pair of dark wings, something approached at the edge of his vision, on the side of the yard nearest the woods. At first, Severus hardly registered the movement, but the moonlight reflected off a bright silver coat and caused him to glance sidelong towards the woods.

Only to see the same silver wolf that had threatened Harry standing on the lawn, gazing at him.

Severus halted, mouth agape. Then he reached for his wand, snarling, "How dare you come here, you mangy beast? Come to see if you can finish what you've started, have you? Well, not while I have breath in my body. You'll not hurt Harry while I can still cast a spell, d'you hear me?"

He shouted that last into the cold winter night, even though he felt a tad ridiculous speaking to a wolf as though it could understand him.

"I'm not deaf. I think half of Yorkshire and Scotland could hear you, Snape."

Severus was flabbergasted. "What . . . who said that? Show yourself!" He spun around, ready to blast whatever or whoever was lurking in the shadows, wondering how any wizard had managed to get past his protective wards so easily. He had set them so no one short of Voldemort could dismantle them, and even then, that would be no easy task and alert him immediately.

"You're looking at me."

The wizard whipped back around so quickly he nearly lost his balance and fell. But he managed to recover his footing with a minimal loss of dignity. He narrowed his eyes and glared daggers at the silver wolf, who was now standing barely ten feet from Snape's boots, wearing what Severus could swear was an amused expression. The damn beast was laughing at him! "What are you? An Animagus?" Severus demanded. "But I've never known one who could talk in another form." He kept his wand trained upon the unpredictable animal.

"I'm special. Though normally I can't speak like this either." Silver answered, sitting in the snow. "Only on this night, out of all the nights of the year."

Severus frowned, puzzled. "Why this night?"

The wolf grinned at him. "You mean you don't know the Christmas legend of the talking animals? A bookworm like you, Severus Snape?"

"Of course I know of it!" Severus sputtered. "I read it to Harry a few nights ago. But . . .it's just a story."

"Is it? Or is that how you wizards interpret it? You know, every story has a grain of truth to it. And this particular one has more than that, as you can tell. St. Nicholas has always granted the request of the animals to speak with a human tongue, to foster understanding between animal and man."

"Oh, indeed?" Severus sneered. "I have just one question for you, wolf. What hold have you over my son? What enchantment have you cast to make him prefer you to me, his father?"

"Spell? No spell whatsoever. I am a wolf, not a wizard any longer."

"Ah ha! I knew it! You are an Animagus. An unregistered one, I'll bet. Who are you?"

"Your son calls me Silver. That is who I am now," the great wolf said maddeningly.

Severus snorted. "Don't play games with me. I am in no mood." He chanted a few sharp words in Latin and a silver mist drifted over the wolf, coalescing into a tall man with blond hair shot through with silver. It was a figure that Severus knew very well, and had hoped to never encounter again. "Lupin!" he growled, suppressing an instinctive flinch. "I should have known it was you. You were always poking your nose where it didn't belong, like the rest of the bloody Marauders."

"Be fair, Snape! I wasn't half as bad as Sirius. Or James. And Wormtail was the worst for sneaking around and listening to private conversations," the former wizard protested.

"Really? And I suppose you were just along for the fun of it?" sneered the other.

"Actually, I went along with their schemes to try and do some damage control. I didn't enjoy getting in trouble all the time."

"Right. How did you come to be trapped in this shape?" asked Severus knowingly, for if Remus could have changed forms he would have done so long before now.

"I am not trapped in this shape. It was a . . .sort of gift. The answer to a prayer, if you will. Like Harry is to you, Snape."

"What the bloody hell would you know about that?" Severus bristled.

"Oh, I know plenty about you and Harry, the kid talks nonstop, and he told me all about his dad, the great Potions Master, and how he wishes he could be just like you when he grows up."

Severus was stunned. "Harry . . .said that? About me?"

Lupin cocked an ear, puzzled at the astonishment in Severus's tone. "Yes. Nearly knocked me over, when I realized who he was talking about. James is probably rolling over in his grave to hear his son say that about Snivellus the . . .never mind, I'm sure you can guess what he'd say." The wolf said apologetically.

"I can. And it's too damn bad, because Lily chose me to raise her son if anything happened to her, not the mutt Black or you-werewolf!" Severus shot back, all the old resentment surfacing.

But Silver merely flicked an ear at Severus' angry tone and said only, "And she was right, much as I didn't want to admit it. Sirius . . .betrayed her and I . . .I could never be a fit parent to a child with my curse. You were the only logical choice. She always liked you, Snape."

Severus merely nodded, but inwardly he rejoiced to hear that his beloved Lily returned his affection for her, if only as a friend. "Albus wished to place him with his Muggle relatives, Lily's sister Petunia and her husband."

Silver wrinkled his nose in disgust. "Is he barmy? Must be, for Petunia always detested magic and anyone who practiced it. They would be the last people to raise Harry with any kind of warmth or decency."

"We agree on something then, wolf."

"It's a miracle," Remus barked.

"Pardon me if I don't abase myself," said Snape sarcastically. "How did you come here, Lupin? Did you follow me from London?"

"Hardly. I was brought here after . . . I became the silver wolf you see before you. This forest . . . is where wolves dwelled. It is the Wolf Wood of all the tales."

Severus laughed derisively. "Oh, please! Spare me the melodrama, Lupin! Next you'll tell me the wolf prince Silverstrike appeared and made you into a full wolf."

"He did. Or rather . . . his spirit did."

"And I'm the Easter bunny. Do you think I'm stupid, Lupin? What reason would Silverstrike's spirit have for granting you, a werewolf, such a thing?"

"I don't know. Do you think I enjoy being a monster, Snape? That people point at me in the street and whisper behind my back and mothers hide their children from me?" Lupin demanded bitterly. "I have always loathed what I became each full moon."

"Could have fooled me. You would have cheerfully ripped me apart that night, or have you forgotten?"

The wolf bared his teeth angrily. "That was none of my doing, Severus! I was as much a victim as you. I couldn't control myself when I transformed, that's why Dumbledore put me in the Shack, to make sure no one encountered me while I was . . .out of my head. What James and Sirius did . . .I had no knowledge of it until it happened, it was not planned!"

"Why should I believe you?"

Silver's eyes glowed with a sharp light. "Because I speak the truth. I cannot lie, Snape. One of the conditions Silverstrike set when he gave me this body. Wolves don't lie, that's something only humans do. I was furious that James and Sirius thought it was all right to take advantage of my . . .affliction and use me to . . .hurt another student. I would have told you as much, but you never gave me a chance to speak to you afterwards. Not that I could blame you. I never forgave either of my friends for making me become even more of a monster than I already was. That night marked the end of the Marauders for me. If you'll recall, I barely hung around them at all during sixth and seventh year."

Severus pursed his lips, but he could not deny the truth of Lupin's words, much as he longed to. The werewolf had stopped following the other two bullies about, Severus had not seen him except in class, and he had never tormented Severus the way Potter and Black had. "You're telling me that you broke from your best mates over me?"

Remus nodded. "Yes. That was the last straw. They had always treated my curse . . .cavalierly, I guess. They didn't take it seriously. I did. I knew I was dangerous, but I wanted so much to be like they were . . . stupid teenagers whose only worry was detention and docked House points. Not becoming a ravening beast every full moon who hungered for human flesh. " The amber eyes darkened to an almost brown hue, and if wolves could look regretful, Silver did.

"And are you so much better now, Lupin? You almost bit Harry yesterday!" Severus accused.

The silver wolf stiffened and growled in denial, "No, Snape! I would never hurt Harry. I dragged him out of the damn lake, he was

drowning and freezing, I was the one who howled for you to come and help me, because all I could do was keep him warm with my body and it wasn't enough! How could you ever think I would hurt him?"

"Perhaps because I saw you nibbling on him, you damned vicious-" Severus exploded.

"I was not nibbling on him, Snape! I was removing the damn ice from his hair!"

"Your teeth were next to his face!" shouted the Potions Master. "You were drooling all over him!"

"Yes, because I was nervous!" snapped Remus. "Wolves pant when they're nervous, damn it all. I couldn't help it. I was terrified he was going to die and all I could do was watch it! I couldn't stand . . . just sitting there and doing nothing . . . I . . . love him, Severus . . ."

"Like a nice juicy steak?"

The amber eyes narrowed and the wolf growled softly. "Damn you! Can you not see me for what I am, Snape?"

"What are you, Lupin? A werewolf! One that nearly killed me."

"I was. I am that no longer. Silverstrike . . . transformed me into a true wolf. I was . . . sick of enduring the curse, years and years of becoming a thing hated and feared, hunted by everyone . . . I drank aconite mixed with silver nitrate . . ."

Severus remained silent, his sarcastic tongue stilled by the former werewolf's revelation.

"I begged for death to come and take me away . . . instead the wolf prince came, and told me he could grant me release from my curse. I asked him why, and all he said was a debt was owed. I didn't understand what he meant, I still don't. But it didn't matter. He . . . breathed on me . . . and I became a true wolf. The werewolf curse was broken, and before you ask me how, I don't know how he

did it. All he said to me before he transformed me was to ask me if I surrendered myself to him. I said yes, because I didn't care anymore . . .and he made me into the silver wolf. But I wasn't all wolf, I could still understand human speech and I remembered who I was once. "

"How long have you been like this?"

"Two years this Christmas Eve."

"You cannot change back?"

"No. Not that I am aware of."

"Does Albus know?"

"No. Nor will he. I wouldn't have revealed myself to you either, Snape, except for Harry . . .I didn't want you to think I would hurt him . . .I've been with him this whole week . . .playing in the snow . . ."

"And letting him think you were Silverstrike."

"Hey, it's not my fault I look kind of like him," Remus retorted. "You were the one who read him the tale, Severus. It's only natural that Harry would mistake me for that one afterwards."

"You encouraged him."

"What was I supposed to do? Write my real name in the snow? Sometimes . . .the wolf instinct makes me forget . . .for a time who I really am . . .especially when I haven't seen another person in months. You and Harry are the first people I've seen in over eight months. Visitors rarely come here. This is Wolf Wood, after all. Even if I'm the only living wolf in it."

"You expect me to believe that you are content to live . . .this way?"

"Yes. At least this way I'm not a monster. This was the price required to break the curse. And it is one that I pay willingly. To live out my days as a wolf or to remain a werewolf. The choice was not hard."

Severus gazed into the big wolf's eyes and found himself slowly believing the former wizard. There was no deception in the amber orbs, and Severus was trained to spot falsehoods from his days as a spy. Suddenly, Harry's plaintive childish treble echoed in his head. "He's a good wolf, Dad. He saved me . . . he's my friend."

Looking at the wolf before him, which was reminiscent of a magnificent specimen he had seen as a boy on a science and nature TV show, Severus could almost believe his son was right. Animals did not lie, that much was true. Remus met his gaze steadily, despite the instinct that urged him to challenge or submit to the Potions Master, since direct eye contact was a form of challenge to wolves. "There are potions now to control the werewolf nature," Snape said, offering a backhanded olive branch.

"Yes, but they are expensive and require the skills of a Potions Master to brew, and I do not want to leave my life to chance. I am tired, Severus, of being the damn outcast, the one who is persecuted every hour of every day for breathing. I would think that you, of all people, would understand that, and thus my choice to remain a wolf forevermore."

Severus looked away then, for there was something in the silver wolf's gaze that stripped his soul bare, and he didn't want to feel that odd kinship with the werewolf, the kinship of those who have been the victim of prejudice and bullies, of scorn and revulsion, who have suffered pain and humiliation nearly beyond endurance. You know what he means, Sev, whispered his conscience. It has been years, but there are some things you never forget . . .no matter how much you want to . . .you remember the way it was . . .when you were hounded and attacked day after day for being too smart, for being a Slytherin, for simply existing, as Potter put it . . .oh, yes . . . you know. . . and Lily was your Silverstrike . . .she saved you from yourself and brought meaning back into your miserable school days. If not for her, you would have become lost to the Dark Path . . .The Potions Master scowled, because he didn't want to understand Lupin, he wanted him to remain the werewolf, the killer whom he could fear and hate , not this . . .this kindred spirit . . .whom his son adored . . .

"He likes you better than me," he mumbled, not even realizing he had spoken aloud.

"Don't be ridiculous, Snape. Of course he doesn't. I'm a playmate, you're his father."

Severus remained with his back to the silver wolf, feeling his face burn with embarrassment. "What would you know of it, wolf?"

"More than you. That kid practically worships you, don't you know that? Are you blind? All day long, he talks about you. My dad said . . .my dad did this . . .my dad knows that . . .listening to Harry talk about you, Snape, one would think you were Merlin, God, and the Muggle Einstein all rolled into one. And you think he likes me better?" Remus gave a soft howl of disbelief and amusement.

"He does. He said he hated me." Severus gritted out, unable to help himself.

"Hated you? Why?"

"Because I forbid him to see you again. I said you were dangerous and he screamed at me that I was wrong and that he hated me. Then he went and locked himself in my bedroom."

"Merlin, Severus!"

"What's so damn funny?" grumbled the other wizard, stubbornly looking into the trees.

"You. You actually think he meant that, don't you? Snape, you might be a brilliant wizard, but you're a dunderhead when it comes to understanding little kids."

"Oh, and you're a bloody expert?"

"Now I am. As a wolf I can detect truth and lies by scent, and I also remember when I was a kid I lost my temper and told my dad I hated him too, for not letting me sleep over Sirius's or something. Did I mean it? Hell, no! Well, at the time, I did, but afterwards . . .I felt guilty

and ashamed and all I wanted was to tell my dad I was sorry and to have him forgive me. Haven't you ever done that, said something you didn't really mean in a temper?"

An unwelcome image flashed into Severus's head then, of a crowd of jeering children surrounding him, and Lily, threatening to hex James for hurting him . . .and allowing his anger at his tormentor to get the better of him and call Lily a Mudblood . . ."Once."

"There, you see? That's all Harry did. Said something he didn't really mean in a temper. Happens to all of us. " the silver wolf said, then sniffed. "He already feels guilty and awful for saying it, I can smell the remorse from here."

Severus turned around then, hope glinting in his ebony eyes. "You're certain?"

"Yes. He's kicking himself right about now, and wondering how much trouble he's in, most likely."

Severus scowled, relief intermingling with a delayed anger now. "If I were a man like my father . . .he'd not be able to sit down for a week . . ."

"But you aren't." Remus said knowingly.

"What did yours do to you for saying that?"

"Uh . . .threatened to ship me off to my great aunt Esmerelda, who I detested, grounded my arse for a week, and washed out my mouth with soap for being a disrespectful brat, I think." The silver wolf grimaced. "I learned my lesson. I never talked like that to him again."

Severus nodded. That seemed fair. Not too lenient and not too harsh. But the timing nagged him. "I don't want to punish him on Christmas, even if he does deserve to spend all of the holiday standing with his nose to a wall."

"So do it after," said Remus simply. "Tell him his punishment starts right after Christmas and let it go at that."

Snape's scowl deepened. "So simple. Why didn't I think of that?"

"Because I'm bloody brilliant and you're not?"

"In your dreams."

"Okay, you overanalyzed the situation, Snape, and overlooked the obvious-that as a parent you can decide when to give out punishments as well as how. It doesn't always have to be the same day, or hour, or whatever. Once, my dad made me wait a whole week before he punished me, and I almost went bonkers . . .the waiting's bloody awful when you're a kid . . trust me on that."

"Humph! Bloody know-it-all."

"Takes one to know one," taunted the other. "Come on, Severus. Admit I give good advice and go and talk to the kid, put him out of his misery."

"No."

"No? What do you mean, no?"

"Just what I said. I think it'd be better if his best friend Silver had a talk with him first."

"But . . .that's . . .what will you be doing in the meantime?"

"Listening at the keyhole," drawled the Potions Master with a wicked smirk.

"You're . . .that's . . .just plain . . .evil, Severus Snape."

"Well, I do have a reputation to maintain, Lupin. The evil dungeon bat, you know."

"What do you want me to say?"

Severus shrugged. "I wouldn't presume to know the mind of such a genius, your brilliance astounds me. Once you've finished enlightening my son, I'll come in and take it from there."

The silver wolf clicked his jaws together meaningfully. "You're lucky I'm a good wolf, Snape . Otherwise . . ."

"You're lucky Harry likes you, Lupin. Or else you'd be howling down at the earth," Severus returned. He waved his wand half-threateningly. "Well? What are you waiting for? Christmas?"

"You're a riot, Snape." Remus grumbled. Then he rose and padded up the stairs. He paused at the door and glared over his shoulder. "You going to open the door, or what?"

"You mean you can't huff and puff and blow it down? What kind of wolf are you?"

"Just open the door, Snape!"

Severus gestured and the door swung open.

Silver loped inside, and followed his nose to the bedroom, where a small boy was curled on a bed, anxiously awaiting the return of his father. Undoing the lock with a softly spoken word, Severus opened the door, then stepped back, allowing the silver wolf to nudge the door open and enter the bedroom, then partially close the door behind him. I cannot believe I am doing this-allowing a wolf-a wolf!-to counsel my son. I must be losing my mind. Losing my bloody mind.

All right, so how did you like the encounter between Sev & Lupin? And was Harry's remorse believable? Were you surprised that Silver was Remus?

Next: A final reconciliation is reached. Only one more chappie to go, but there WILL be a sequel!

Silverstrike's Legacy

Harry sat up as the bedroom door opened, fighting the urge to jump up and hide under the bed. He knew better than to run away from a punishment, and he was not a crybaby coward either. So he waited, dread making him feel slightly sick, for his father to appear. Only instead of a stern Potions Master, a gigantic silver wolf walked into the room.

"Silver?" Harry rubbed his eyes. "I'm dreaming, right? How'd you get in here? You'd better leave, before my dad finds out."

"In a minute. We need to have a little talk first, Harry."

Harry nearly fell off the bed. "You can TALK!"

"Of course. It's Christmas Eve," Silver answered solemnly, but with a glint of merriment in his eyes.

"Then that story is true? Not . . .not make-believe?"

"You can hear me, right?"

"Yeah. Wow! That's so wicked!" Harry gasped, smiling. "I wish you could stay and talk with me, but you gotta get out of here, Silver. My dad's really mad at me, and if he comes in here and finds you . . .he'll hex you good."

Silver seemed unconcerned, walking over to the bed and sitting down, his tail wrapped neatly about his paws, putting his head upon the bed and gazing into Harry's eyes. "Your father is the reason I'm here, Harry."

"I'm sorry he hurt you before. He thought you were gonna hurt me, I guess. He doesn't understand about how you and I are friends."

"And that makes you sad and angry, right?"

"yeah, how do you know that?"

"I can smell those emotions on you. As well as guilt and shame. Why do you feel this way, Harry?"

The child squirmed, avoiding the big wolf's gaze. "Dad and I . . .we had a big fight over you. He said I couldn't see you anymore and . . .I got mad and said he was a stupid idiot and I . . .hated him."

"Ah. I see."

"But I didn't mean to! I just . . .I don't know . . .it came out before I could stop it, he made me so mad and upset. . . .I was telling the truth and he didn't believe me and then . . ." The little boy hung his head. "This is like the worst Christmas ever. I'm not gonna get any presents from Father Christmas 'cause I said that to my dad and my dad's probably gonna blister my bum . . .he hates kids that talk back to him and I told him I hated him." Tears began to trickle from his green eyes once again. "He'll probably never forgive me and he wishes my mum never gave me to him to be his special son . . ."

Silver nuzzled the child's hand comfortingly. "Oh, I think your father will forgive you, Harry. Although he is quite upset with you at the moment, he still loves you, even when you're very naughty."

"He does? How do you know?"

"Because I have spoken to your father, Harry Snape, and have seen that he . . ." here the wolf paused, thinking, I can't believe I'm saying this about Snape, of all people, but it's the truth. " . . .is a decent man and a good father. And if you're truly sorry for speaking to him like that, then he will forgive you, Little Mischief."

"I am. He always says think before you open your mouth, only I forgot and I'm real sorry, Silver. It's all my fault Christmas is ruined." Harry sniffled sharply, and a lone tear splashed onto the coverlet.

Silver winced, for Harry's misery was overwhelming, he could smell and feel it, and he gently licked the boy's face in an attempt to provide comfort. Harry buried his face in the silver fur and wept. Remus whined, a wordless crooning sound, trying to get the boy to stop crying. Harry clung to the big animal, his small shoulders

heaving. Remus whimpered, acutely uncomfortable, he had no experience dealing with sobbing kids. Snape, where are you? I don't know what the heck to say to him when he's bawling his eyes out all over my fur. Not to mention getting snot on it too, ugh!

"There now, child. It's not the end of the world. You haven't ruined Christmas."

"Have too," Harry mumbled into Silver's shoulder. "I've been so bad that Father Christmas prob'ly put me on the Naughty List an' now I'm gettin' nuthin' for Christmas."

Silver fought to keep from smiling at Harry's definitive tone. "Are you sure, little one? This can be fixed."

"How?"

"By apologizing to your father and promising to behave from now on."

Harry sat up, wiping his face with his sleeve. "But Silver, how can I do that if Dad won't talk to me? I haven't seen him all night since I came in here. "

There's your cue, Severus. Remus thought, hoping the other man really had been listening to their conversation.

To the wolf's relief, Severus did not miss his opportunity. He tapped on the door and called, "Harry, enough of this sulky attitude, young man. I'm coming in and we're going to have a long talk about your smart mouth."

Harry sat up straight, then hissed, "Quick, Silver, hide under the bed!"

"Why?" the wolf queried, his eyes twinkling.

"'Cause Dad thinks you're a bad wolf that wants to eat me and he said if he caught you around here, he'd hex you to the moon." Harry threw himself face down on the bed, and reached over to yank aside the bedhangings. "There! Hurry!"

Silver didn't move. "Harry, weren't you paying attention? Your father and I have come to an understanding of sorts. He won't hex me."

The door opened and Severus strode in, playing his role of stern parent to the hilt. He fixed his wayward son with a sharp frown. "Well, Mr. Snape? I believe you owe me an apology."

Harry gulped, then started to sit up, though not fast enough to avoid Severus's hand, which delivered a sharp swat to his vulnerable backside. "Oww! I'm sorry, Dad! I really am!" He burst into tears, wailing loudly, "I didn't mean it! I'm so-o-o-rry!"

"You ought to be." Severus lectured over the boy's repentant howls. "You should be ashamed, talking that way to me, Harry James Snape, after everything I've done for you."

Severus moved over to sit next to the youngster, who was sobbing as if he'd been beaten half to death. All this fuss over one smack? Oh, Harry, you are so overdramatic! He reached out and drew his son onto his lap.

Harry froze, sure he was going to end up over Snape's knee. But all the older man did was hold him. "Enough, anyone would think I'd whipped you raw, you little dramatist. Stop crying and look at me."

Harry obeyed, taking the handkerchief he was given and wiping his face. He was puzzled as to why his father hadn't spanked him, but he didn't want to ask for fear of reminding his father that he hadn't been punished yet. "What are you sorry for?" was Sev's next question.

"For saying I hated you and . . .and calling you a stupid idiot . . .and disobeying you and playing with Silver when I wasn't s'posed to . . ." Harry recited the list of his transgressions, ending with, " . . .and I'm really sorry I ruined your Christmas."

"You've been very naughty, son, and acting like a rotten little brat, and I am very disappointed in you," lectured the Potions Master. "Just because you were angry with me for not allowing you to see Silver doesn't mean you have the right to back talk me the way you did. It was rude and disrespectful and that is something I will never tolerate."

Am I understood?" He tilted his son's chin up, making Harry look into his eyes.

"Yes, sir."

"Nose to the wall, mister." Severus set Harry down and pointed to a corner of the bedroom. "Ten minutes. And after that we'll discuss the rest of your punishment, which will be delivered after Christmas."

"After Christmas?" Harry repeated, marching to the corner.

"Yes. Because I'm not going to let your awful behavior ruin my holiday." Severus snapped his fingers and an hourglass floated into view. He turned it over and the sand began to trickle into the bottom.

Harry remained still, not even twitching the way he usually did. He was quite clearly ashamed of his behavior and doing his best to accept the consequences without whining, a fact that both pleased and astonished Severus. Normally, punishments elicited whining and grumbling, and at least one "It's no fair, Dad!" from the seven-year-old. Not this time.

The ten minutes seemed to creep by for an eternity, but Harry forced himself to remain still as a stone, even though it was terribly hard to stand there looking at the wall and counting the lines in the wood paneling.

But at last the eternity was over and Severus called, "Harry, come here."

Harry turned around and walked back, dragging his feet slightly. Now his father was going to wallop him good.

But Severus did not turn him over his knee. Instead he frowned severely and said, "Your punishment is as follows, Mr. Snape: first, I'm going to wash that disrespectful tone out of your mouth with a bar of soap, and then you're grounded until New Year's, plus a week afterwards, since you were already grounded for the skating incident. That will begin right after Christmas."

"Yes, sir. I didn't mean to say I hated you, Dad."

"Promise me you'll never speak like that to me again."

"I promise." Harry whispered, his lower lip trembling pathetically.

"Come here, you impudent incorrigible child." Severus held out his arms.

His son threw himself into them and hung on for dear life. "M'sorry! I love you, Dad. Are you still mad at me?"

"No. I forgive you, and once you've served your punishment, it'll be done and over with, and we won't ever need to have this discussion again. Unless you break your promise, young wizard." Here Severus leveled a Snape glare that made Harry tremble. "And if that happens, you will be the sorriest little boy in Britain. I'll ship you off to live with your Muggle aunt and uncle if you don't learn to behave."

"It won't. I'll be good. Promise on my honor." He never wanted to go and live with Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon again, they were worse than Werewolf Hunters.

Severus hugged him back so hard Harry squeaked. "Love you too, brat."

Harry felt a warm glow spread through him. He hopped up on his father's knee then and said, "But I love Silver too, Dad. And see, I was right, he is a good wolf and he really did save me."

"I know. He explained everything to me while you were locked in the bedroom."

"Then shouldn't you say you're sorry to him for saying he was bad and stuff?" Harry inquired innocently.

Severus went still and did not answer.

Silver, who had been watching the interaction between father and son with interest, wanted to roll over and laugh at Snape's expression of

sour chagrin. Ha! He's got you there, old snake! You do owe me an apology. Question is, will you swallow that pride and admit you were wrong?

There was a long moment of silence.

At last Severus said, "You're right. I was mistaken." He turned to look at the silver wolf sprawled on the rug, who was staring at him with knowing amber eyes. "I misjudged you, Lupin. I . . .saw what I wanted to see, a dangerous predator, not what you truly were, my son's protector. I forgot my own legends and reacted hastily . . .like an ignorant fool. You saved Harry and I am grateful. I . . .apologize for any misunderstanding." There was no reluctance in Snape's voice, and Remus could smell the sincerity upon him.

"No, Severus. You acted like a frantic parent . . .one who loves his child more than anything. I think that is the first time anyone has ever apologized for misjudging me ever, and I thank you for that. No one has ever cared about a werewolf's feelings before."

"You're a werewolf, Silver?" Harry exclaimed, his eyes wide.

"I was once, Harry," answered the wolf. "And my real name is Remus Lupin. I used to be a wizard and went to school with your father."

"Cool! But how come you're a wolf now?"

"That's a long story, Harry." Remus began.

"So what? I like long stories."

The wolf parted his jaws in a lupine grin. "Very well. I was bitten by a werewolf when I was a little boy, around five, and I lived with the curse for years, forced to transform into a . . .ravening beast every month during the full moon. . . ." Remus did not go into great detail, just enough so Harry would understand what an awful burden the werewolf curse was and how people reacted to the young wizard, shunning and fearing him. Harry listened, still and silent upon Severus's lap, as Remus explained how, despairing and lonely, he had walked out into the Forbidden Forest and met the spirit of the

wolf Prince Silverstrike, who had agreed to help free him from the werewolf curse by transforming him into a true wolf, though one who still retained his human memories, thoughts, and feelings. "And that's how I became the silver wolf you see here," finished the former wizard. "Although I'm still puzzled as to why Silverstrike said he owed me a debt when I had never seen him before then."

Harry was thinking hard. Then he spoke up. "Maybe it's because you're one of Will's great-great-great grandsons or something."

Remus wrinkled his nose. "I don't . . . what do you mean?"

"You know, Will Ashkevron, the Potion Master's son who was Silverstrike's friend. The legend says Silverstrike watches over Will's family. Maybe you're related to him."

Remus pricked up his ears. "Merlin's beard! I never thought of that."

"But it makes sense. The friendship between the wolf lord and Will was passed down through generations, if the legend is to be taken as historical fact," said Severus. "Do you have a family tree recorded somewhere, Remus?"

"I . . . yes, I believe so. My family is a pureblooded one and my father did keep a great book with all the names of my ancestors and their deeds since the time of Merlin and Arthur Pendragon. If I were able to use magic I could Summon it . . ."

"Dad, you could Summon it!" said Harry excitedly, bouncing on Sev's knee.

"All right, you pest, now quit jumping all over me, I'm not a rocking horse," he ordered, concealing a wince, for Harry had a bony backside that did not conform well to Severus's knees.

"Hurry, Dad! I wanna know if I'm right!" He half-stood on his toes, then dropped back down to land heavily on the wizard's already aching legs.

"Be still! Now!"

"Sorry." Harry froze.

Severus drew his wand and chanted, "Accio the genealogy records of Remus Lupin!"

A large musty leather-bound tome appeared with a pop in the room next to Severus.

The Potions Master carefully picked it up, handling it gently, for the parchment pages crackled and were brown with age. "Is this it, Remus?"

The wolf came over and peered at the book. "Yes, I think so. It's kind of hard for me to read, without hands and a wolf's eyes weren't meant for reading print. If you wouldn't mind, Severus, could you look at the appropriate entry? It ought to be near the beginning, since the Wolf in Winter tale takes place somewhere around the time of Merlin. I'd reckon."

Severus paged through the tome reverently, with Harry peering at the odd writing, which was embellished with plenty of flourishes and some of the spelling was archaic. "They spelled wolf wrong, Dad. It hasn't got an e on the end."

"That's an old form of the word, son. Now hush, I need to concentrate. Why don't you go and sit by your friend Silver while I read?"

"Okay." Harry obliged, slipping off Severus's knee and going over to sit on the floor, leaning against the big wolf's side, one arm thrown casually across the furry gray back. "Uh, d'you mind if I call you Silver, sir?"

Remus gave an amused yip. "No, Harry. It is rather fitting, and during school, some of my friends used to call me Moony. But I think I like Silver better."

"So do I. Not all wolves howl at the moon," Harry said.

"Quiet, you two! I can barely read some of this, the writing is so cramped and faded and the language is difficult to interpret," Severus ordered irritably, squinting hard at a page. The other two mumbled apologies and fell silent, allowing the scholar wizard to decipher the tome in peace.

After an interminable, to Harry at least, twenty-five minutes, Severus straightened and said, "My son was right, Lupin. You are a direct descendant of Will Ashkevron, who was named Wolf Friend to Silverstrike, prince of the Wolf Wood. Will himself writes here that "at the end of his very long life-over a hundred years old-Silverstrike could not relinquish his guardianship over myself and my family, and so he used the last of his magic to bind himself in spirit form to Wolf Wood, and also to my descendents. He pledged that whenever their need was greatest, he would come, and give what aid he could, for as long as he could. And though it saddens me beyond measure to never see my beloved friend again, it is a great comfort that he shall be watching over me and mine, for we tend to get into more than our share of trouble. Silverstrike's wise counsel should prove to be a Godsend, literally. . ."

"Well, I'll be a crumple horned snorkack!" Remus barked.

"A what?" Severus repeated, throwing the wolf a blank look.

"Never mind. It's an expression a Ravenclaw in our year, Lovegood, used to say." He nuzzled Harry affectionately. "You are too smart, Little Mischief."

Harry grinned proudly. "I remember everything I read, Silver. Just like Dad."

Severus raised an eyebrow at Remus's pet name for Harry, but refrained from making a comment, since the wolf's choice fit Harry to a T.

"And now you know why Silverstrike helped you," said the Potions Master. "As a direct descendent, he was duty bound to do so."

Remus sat up straighter, clearly proud of his newfound ancestry. "Or maybe he just liked me."

Severus rolled his eyes. "Don't flatter yourself, Lupin." He waved his wand and the book was transported to an empty space upon his library shelf. "I'm assuming you wish me to look after that for you?"

"If you wouldn't mind. Thank you."

Severus waved off the other's thanks. He glanced at his watch. "Harry, it's time for you to be in bed. Otherwise Father Christmas won't visit here."

But Harry made no move to get to his feet and return to his room. "He won't come anyway, Dad."

"Why do you say that?"

"'Cause I was too bad. He prob'ly crossed my name off the Nice Kids list already after what I did."

"You don't know that, Harry." Severus said gently. "I think it would take more than being a disrespectful little boy to make Father Christmas cross off your name. Besides which, you apologized and will be punished for it, and Father Christmas knows that and will forgive you, I think. Wouldn't you agree, Silver?"

The big wolf nodded. "Yes. St. Nicholas knows a repentant child when he sees one. Go on to bed, Harry. Come morning, you'll see that Father Christmas has forgiven you for your naughtiness."

"Okay, Silver!" Then Harry looked at Severus and said, "Hey, Dad, can Silver stay for Christmas? And . . . maybe even longer, like forever?"

Severus hesitated. "That would be up to him, son. But he's not a pet, Harry."

"I know, Dad! I'm not dumb!"

"Watch your tone, little boy," warned his father.

"Yes, sir. Will you stay, Silver? Please?" Harry begged.

"I . . .well . . .I suppose I can stay for the holiday . . .but I don't know about after . . ." the wolf said awkwardly. "I wouldn't want to impose upon you or your dad . . .though I wouldn't mind being your guardian."

Harry turned his pleading gaze upon Severus. "Please, Dad? Please? He's my friend . . .he saved my life . . .please?"

Severus thought for a long moment. It was true that Harry seemed to behave a little better when the wolf was around, and at least Remus kept him out of trouble for the most part if he were around. You wanted to find a friend for him, Severus. And now you have, though a transformed wizard was not quite what you had in mind. But then again, when has Harry ever done anything like other children? Almost never.

"Where would you live, Remus?"

"In the forest, of course, though I will never be far from you when you need me, Harry. Severus? Would that be acceptable to you? I promise to never enter your home without an invitation or countermand any of your orders concerning your son, even if I don't agree with them. You're his father, not me. I further swear that I shall keep Harry safe from anyone who tries to hurt him, including You-Know-Who himself."

Now Severus was faced with two sets of begging eyes.

The Potions Master groaned. He did owe Remus a debt for saving Harry and the longer he thought about it, the more an extra set of eyes and ears appealed to him. Harry was like a whirlwind and there were days Severus often wished he could duplicate himself just so he could keep up. With Remus there, however, he wouldn't need to worry so much.

Are you bloody crazy? You're actually considering inviting a werewolf into your home? shrieked one part of his mind.

Former werewolf and it'd be useful sometimes to have someone watching Harry that I can trust, someone dependable, so I don't have to worry about where he is or what he's doing. And at least Remus won't let Harry wrap him around his little finger. I think. Plus, Harry really does love him, and I guess I can tolerate the wolf for Harry's sake . . .

Severus cleared his throat. "All right, Harry. Silver can stay."

Harry let out a yell that could probably be heard in China. "YES! Thanks, Dad! You're the best!"

He ran up to both his father and his lupine friend and kissed and hugged them. It was like his very own Christmas miracle. And what had started out as a terrible awful day had now become one of the best Christmas Eve's ever. Then he scampered off to bed, for he didn't want to be awake when Father Christmas came down the chimney. Not even his impending punishment could dampen his spirits.

Severus followed to tuck him in, and Silver stretched out on guard beside the door, and outside the wind sprites danced and twirled inside ever changing snowflakes, laughing and whispering among themselves about the miracle that had occurred, which had nothing to do with animals talking, and everything to do with a certain Potions Master learning the lesson of tolerance and a small wizard learning the value of keeping one's promise and a silver wolf learning how to trust and love again.

And deep in the woods, a wolf howled, low and long, in triumph, for his wayward son had found at last a place to call his own, and a family to belong to. Fare you well, Remus, my son. May you always remember the legend of the wolf in winter, for you have found what you truly seek at last, and your curse is broken forevermore. Go in peace, my son, prince of Wolf Wood.

Then the spirit wolf turned and vanished into the snowy night, and the forest was still under a canopy of stars and a cloak of virgin snow. Until the sound of bells was heard as another magical being made his

entrance upon the roof of a certain cottage to fulfill the rest of little wizard's Christmas list.

The End

Well, what did you think of the ending?

All's well that ends well, to quote Shakespeare from Twelfth Night, one of my favorite plays.

A very big thank you to everyone who has read and reviewed this little fic. Would you like me to write more in this series?

This is a short note letting everyone know that I will be posting the sequel in about five minutes, so keep an eye out for Snow Girl & the Sorcerer's Son and thank all of you for adding this one to your favorite stories list and everything!